



USAID
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AFGHANISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Women Gain Access to Justice

USAID campaign promotes women's rights, use of the justice system, and the importance of education.



Photo: USAID/ARoLP

Using an Access to Justice Campaign poster, a USAID worker explains women's right to inheritance to a woman entering a health clinic in Baghlan.



Photo: USAID/ARoLP

Students in Nangarhar hold their new backpacks, which read "Access to justice is the right of every man and woman." Among other materials, USAID distributed 55,000 school bags during the campaign.

Afghanistan's Constitution clearly states that men and women are equal in the eyes of the law. However, violations of women's rights are widespread, and many Afghan women do not know how to use the formal justice system to protect their rights. To provide women – as well as men and children – with a better understanding of gender equality, women's rights, and the legal system, USAID launched a public awareness campaign in Nangarhar and Baghlan provinces in spring 2009.

The one-month *Women's Access to Justice Campaign* reached out to communities in both rural and urban areas. It encouraged women to use the justice system by explaining that they have the right to use the courts and that it is not shameful to do so. The campaign used a variety of media, ensuring that information reached even those women who live in remote villages or who cannot read. The message that "access to justice is the right of every man and woman" was repeated in both broadcast media and on thousands of posters, shopping bags, school bags, and other items that get frequent public use.

Although there was some public resistance in more conservative areas, the overall reaction to the campaign was enthusiastic. In one district in Baghlan, Mr. Emam Ali, head of the local *shura* (council), expressed his support and pledged to continue teaching his community about access to justice and gender equality under the law. "We welcome this innovative approach to educating people about women's rights. I promise that every family in our district will be informed of the theme of this campaign through our weekly meeting," he said.

The campaign also promoted the importance of formal education for girls and boys, with positive results. The principal of a girls' high school in Puli Khumri, Baghlan reported a higher turnout in admission and registration of students after USAID distributed school bags and other campaign materials. Bibi Zainab Girls' School Principal Bibi Haji Afghan Gul also praised the program and highlighted its broad reach in Nangarhar. "By distributing the school bags to the students," she said, "you are not only educating the students, but [also] their families and everyone in the community who will see and read the message on the backpack."